



Boulder County Early Care and Education Needs Assessment Summary of Key Findings

In the spring of 2009, The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County contracted with the University of Colorado at Denver (UCD) to update a countywide early childhood care and education needs assessment originally conducted in 1999. The study was completed in June 2009. In order to explore selected topics in greater detail, two supplemental analyses of the UCD data were done, the first in August 2009 examining child care use and needs of two age groups of children, infants/toddlers and preschoolers, and the second in December 2009 analyzing the use of licensed versus unlicensed care among Boulder County families.

The following report summarizes key findings from the UCD study and the supplemental analyses and presents selected comparisons between the UCD study and the 1999 study.

Methodology

- UCD conducted a telephone survey of a random sample of 400 Boulder County families with at least one child aged birth through five about their child care use and needs. The findings from this survey are generalizable to all county families with one or more children in that age group.
- Targeted samples of Spanish-speaking families and families with special needs children were also surveyed in order to explore the child care use and needs of these populations in greater detail. The targeted sample of Spanish-speaking parents had 69 responses, and the targeted sample of special needs parents had 14 responses. The results of these surveys can be applied only to those who responded and not to a larger population.

Key Findings from the Random Sample Telephone Survey

Families with Child Aged Birth to Five Currently in Child Care

- Fully three-quarters (77.3%) of surveyed families currently had at least one child aged birth to 5 in regular child care. Low-income families were significantly less likely than higher income families to use child care.
- Families primarily needed child care so they could work (46.0%) and, to a lesser extent, so their child could socialize/interact with other children (24.9%) and to help their child learn/prepare for school (26.5%).
- Among families with a child in care, the most frequent problem in finding care was finding *affordable* child care, which was a “major” or “moderate” problem for nearly one-third (31.1%) of parents.
- The great majority of survey respondents were very satisfied with all aspects of their child’s child care. This was equally true for low-income families.



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- A majority of children (56.0%) were in a preschool program, including Head Start. More than two-fifths (40.8%) were in a home care situation, either cared for in their own home or in someone else's home. One-quarter were in a child care center.
- The great majority of families (83.5%) said that their provider was licensed.
- Families had their child in child care for an average of 20 hours in a typical week. A little over half of children (51.4%) were in child care 4-5 days in a typical week. Slightly more than half (53.7%) were in part-day care, and 43.0% were in full-day care.

Families with No Children Aged Birth to Five Currently in Child Care

- Slightly less than one-quarter (22.8%) of surveyed families did not currently have a child aged birth to 5 currently in care.
- The unmet need for child care was relatively small: 6.3% of the 400 surveyed families were currently looking for child care.
- Parents looking for care were substantially more likely than parents with a child currently in care to say that the following problems were a “major” or “moderate” problem in finding care: finding affordable care (80.0%), a situation that feels comfortable (64.0%), care that is conveniently located (44.0%), and quality care (36.0%).
- Parents looking for care were asked what kind of child care arrangement they would prefer. Almost half (48.0%) wanted their child to attend a pre-school program, including Head Start.
- Parents looking for care anticipated needing an average of 18 hours of care per week. The greatest proportion (44.0%) wanted care for three days in a typical week. Three-quarters (76.0%) said they would need part-day rather than full-day care.

Low-Income Families

- Almost one-quarter (24.0%) of surveyed families were low income, that is, they earned less than \$60,000 total income in 2008.
- Low-income families were four times as likely as higher income families to be Hispanic (20.9% versus 4.5%), and five times as likely to be single-parent families (8.8% versus 1.7%). More than half (57.1%) of low-income families lived in Longmont, compared to one-third of higher income families.
- Low-income families were substantially less likely than higher income families to have a child currently in child care (61.5% versus 82.6%).
- Low-income families were substantially more likely to say that finding affordable child care was a “major” or “moderate” problem when looking for child care than higher income families, 44.6% versus 26.9%. Lower income families also were somewhat more likely to say that discrimination was a problem when looking for child care, but usually thought it was a “minor” rather than a “major” or “moderate” problem.
- Low-income and higher income families with a child age 0-5 in child care were equally likely to have their child go to a child care center or preschool including Head Start. Low-income families were more than three times as likely to have their child cared for in a relative's home as higher income families (14.3% versus 3.8%), and they also were somewhat more likely to have a relative care for their child in the child's home (12.5% versus 7.6%).



Special Needs Children

- Ten percent (10.3%) of survey respondents had at least one child aged birth to 5 who had been identified as having special needs. The great majority (85.4%) of these children had speech/language problems, and 41.5% had physical problems.
- Of the 41 special needs children identified in the survey, 80.5% were currently in care on a regular basis.

Key Findings from the Targeted Surveys

Spanish-Speaking Families

- All of the 69 targeted Spanish-speaking families were low income. These respondents also had relatively low education levels. On average, Spanish-speaking parents whose children were not in child care had lower education than parents whose children were in care.
- Slightly more than half had at least one child aged 0 to 5 currently in child care. Similar to the random sample survey parents, these parents primarily needed child care so that they could work. The second most frequently cited reason for needing child care was to help their child learn/prepare for school.
- Fewer than half of parents said that any of the listed problems was a “major” or “moderate” problem when looking for child care. The biggest problems were finding child care that was available the days and times needed (44.1%), finding care that they could easily get to considering their transportation situation (42.4%), and finding quality care (40.6%). In contrast, the most frequent major/moderate problem in the random sample survey was finding affordable child care.
- Three-fifths of children were in a preschool program, including Head Start, and half were in a home care situation (in their own or someone else’s home). Very few children were in a child care center.
- Fewer than half (45.7%) reported that their provider was licensed.
- Slightly less than half did not currently have their child in child care. Two-thirds of this group said that they currently needed child care or were looking for child care because they would need it in the near future. Unmet need was much higher in the targeted sample of Spanish-speaking families (about 30% of all 69 of these families) than in the random sample survey (about 6%).
- Parents were asked what kind of child care arrangement they would prefer. Most parents wanted either a child care center or a preschool program including Head Start.

Special Needs Children

- Parents of special needs children who were in child care reported that the biggest problems were finding quality child care and finding a provider and situation that feels comfortable.
- None of the special needs children currently in child care were in a child care center. Most were cared for in their own or someone else’s home. Only one parent reported that their provider was licensed.
- Parents were generally satisfied with their child care arrangement and were most satisfied with quality of care, location, safety and type of care setting. They were less satisfied with how the provider dealt with their child’s special needs and the cost of care.



Supplementary Analyses

Child Care Use and Needs by Age of Child

Using the sample of 400 randomly selected Boulder County families, the findings were broken out for two age groups – infants and toddlers (ages birth to 2) and preschoolers (ages 3 to 5).

- Among Boulder County families having a child aged 0 to 2, 38.3% had a child of that age currently in child care. 84.5% of families with a child aged 3 to 5 had a child of that age in child care.
- Work was the most common reason for needing child care, cited by 80.5% of families with an infant/toddler in care and 40.6% of families with a preschooler in care. School readiness and opportunities for socialization were also frequently cited by the families of preschoolers.
- Families with an infant/toddler in care most frequently used some type of home-based care, either in their home or someone else’s home – a total of 62.4%. Preschool was the most common type of care used by families with a child aged 3-to-5 in care, 64.5%.
- Families with an infant/toddler in care were more likely to experience “moderate” or “major” problems in finding care than families with a preschool child in care.
- Affordability was the most frequent moderate/major problem, experienced by about one in three families with children in care in both age groups.
- Infant/toddler care was far more expensive than care for preschool-age children. Families with a child aged 0 to 2 in care paid an average total of \$1,015 per month for care for all children aged birth to 5, compared to an average total of \$636 for families with a 3-to-5 year old child in care.

Use of Licensed and Unlicensed Care

- Among Boulder County families having a child aged birth to 5 in care, 83.5% used licensed care and 15.3% used either unlicensed care or a combination of licensed and unlicensed care.
- Higher income families (income ≥ \$60,000) with a child aged birth to 5 in care were more likely to use licensed care than were lower income families (income < \$60,000), 85.3% versus 76.8%.
- One in four families (24.7%) with an infant/toddler (aged birth to 2) in care used unlicensed care, either solely or partly, as did 13.2% of families with a preschooler (aged 3 to 5) in care.
- Among families with a child aged birth to 5 in care, those most likely to use licensed care had a child in care aged 3 to 5 and were higher income, 87.6%, and those least likely to use licensed care had a child in care aged birth to 2 and were lower income, 64.3% (Table 1).

Table 1. Use of licensed care, by family income and age of child in care

	Aged 0-2	Aged 3-5
Income ≥ \$60,000	74.1%	87.6%
Income < \$60,000	64.3%	80.0%

- Families with a special needs child in care were slightly less likely than were families with a non-special needs child in care to use licensed care, 78.8% versus 84.1%.



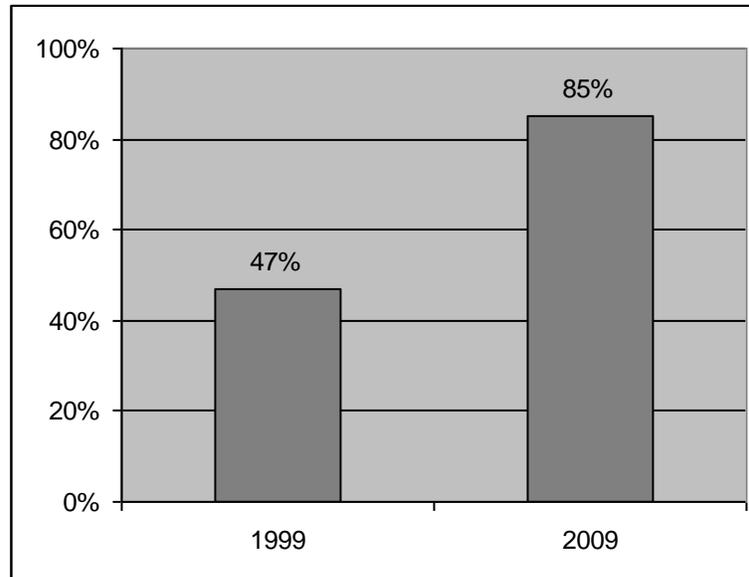
- An estimated 1,726 Boulder County families with one or more children aged birth to 5 used unlicensed care, either solely or partly.

Comparison of 1999 and 2009 Boulder County Needs Assessments

Because the 1999 study randomly sampled families with at least one child aged 12 or younger, only findings that could be broken out for the same age groups of children were compared between the two studies.

- In 1999, 47% of children aged 3 to 5 were in care, compared to 85% in 2009 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percent of children aged 3-5 in child care



- While work was the single most common reason for using child care for 3-to-5 year old children in both 1999 and 2009, it was far more frequently mentioned in the former year than in the latter, 85% versus 41% (Table 2). The child’s socialization and education were mentioned by less than 10% of parents in 1999, as compared to 26% and 31%, respectively in 2009.

Table 2. Primary reason for using child care among Boulder County families with a child aged 3-5 currently in child care

	1999*	2009
Work	85%	41%
Child’s socialization	7%	26%
Child’s education	5%	31%
Other	7%	2%

* Responses summed to more than 100% because more than one reason could be given.



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- Preschool was used far more frequently in 2009 than in 1999, 56.0% versus 23.5% (Table 3). Care in someone else's home was used more often in 1999 than in 2009, 31.1% and 12.9%, respectively.

Table 3. Child care arrangements used by Boulder County families with a child aged 0-5 currently in child care

	1999*	2009
Preschool	23.5%	56.0%
Child care center	24.4%	25.2%
Child's home, by non-relative	14.3%	13.6%
Someone else's home (child care home, friend, neighbor)	31.1%	12.9%
Child's home, by relative	0%	8.4%
Relative's home	5.9%	5.8%
Other	7.6%	10.7%

* Only families with a child aged 0-5 in care.